



NRC NEWS

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NRC STAFF ISSUES BULLETIN TO NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS ON INSPECTING CERTAIN REACTOR PIPING COMPONENTS

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has issued a Bulletin to companies licensed to operate pressurized water reactors in the United States, requesting information on current inspection methods of certain equipment so that NRC staff can determine if supplemental measures are needed.

Some alloys used in components of nuclear reactors are susceptible to cracking when exposed to coolant water during normal operation. The inspections covered in the Bulletin examine components made of those alloys that impact reactor piping, such as the sleeves for heater elements in a reactor's pressurizer, a device which allows coolant to remain liquid at higher temperatures. Experience with these components shows this issue is not an immediate safety problem.

"The NRC wants to ensure licensee inspections identify any onset of cracking in an effective and timely manner," said Bruce Boger, Director of the Division of Inspection Program Management in the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation.

Inspections that detect through-wall leakage from the components in question, conducted at a plant's next refueling outage, should help licensees determine the components' structural integrity. For example, a visual inspection of 100 percent of each component's circumference would be effective in finding leakage and would satisfy the NRC.

The Bulletin requests licensees to provide a written response by July 28 on several areas of information, including:

- the materials from which the components in question were fabricated;
- the inspections that have been and will be performed to ensure any degradation of the components is identified, properly characterized and repaired, and;
- an explanation why the inspection program is adequate for maintaining the integrity of the reactor's coolant pressure boundary.

Within 60 days of restarting after the next inspection of the components described in the Bulletin, licensees must submit one of two documents:

- a statement of the inspections performed, the conditions found, any follow-up examinations of flaws in leaking components, and corrective actions or repairs taken, or;

-- if the licensee could not complete the inspections, a summary of what inspections were performed and the methods used, as well as the information required in the first option.

Bulletin 2004-01, "Inspection of Alloy 82/182/600 Materials Used in the Fabrication of Pressurizer Penetrations and Steam Space Piping Connections at Pressurized-Water Reactors," is available on the NRC web site at:

<http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/gen-comm/bulletins/2004/> .

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